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PPEL (Politics, Philosophy, Economics, and Law)

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE AND FREE SPEECH?

Sheila Kennedy once said, “We cannot find common ground without civility, and we cannot solve our problems without finding common ground.” Never has this quote been more important than today, as civil discourse becomes less and less common.

I’ve seen firsthand the value of free speech time and time again, both on a personal level and on a national level. I currently serve as an ASUA senator for the University of Arizona, and one of our proudest achievements was that we were able to fight to keep the Sunlink free and accessible for all students this semester. However, this never would have been possible without students and legislators alike being willing to engage with us in civil discourse, and without us having journalists to help us spread our message and make our case. However, positive discourse like this has become increasingly rare. One of the primary reasons why civil discourse has become rarer is because Americans are no longer confronted with ideas that challenge them. This is

largely because media outlets like Fox News and CNN afford us the opportunity to encase ourselves in an echo chamber that confirms our innate biases. Without a willingness to confront new and challenging ideas, civil discourse is lost.

This doesn’t just affect individual Americans, the ramifications echo outwards into higher levels of government. Take for example the increasingly common Federal government shutdowns, which are often the result of legislators failing to come to the table and agree on a budget. S&P Global analysts said “a shutdown costs the economy about \$6.5 billion per week [in lost productivity], or about 0.2 percent of gross domestic product growth,” (Bovino, 2018). Incidents like this are symptomatic of a much larger problem, and clearly have far reaching ramifications. Thus, it is vital to provide platforms for younger generations to learn the value of free speech and civil discourse.